

There and Back Again

by Terasa

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Summary: Ash, Andi, and Kharl get thrown some new drama when Ashley is sucked through a portal that lands her with a certain Company on a mission to reclaim their homeland. Will she get home safe and sound after she sets up a Dwarf and Hobbit and will Andrea shank Aragorn's ex when she shows up at the Citadel?[Sequel to It's Kharl's Fault] Bagginshield, Secretly-A-Fangirl helped.

1. AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY: New Life

Screams echo off the walls of the Citadel, the type of screams that sent sane people running in the other direction, but I've never been considered sane. Outside was just as bad, summer storms hitting us hard yet even they didn't seem as bad as the way Andrea's raging inside. Another scream sounds from the direction I'm heading, making me wince and pick up my pace.

All too soon for my liking I open the door to the King's chambers, out of breath as I walk through the sitting room to the bedroom door where Aragorn, Legolas, and Haldir are hanging out. Aragorn's pacing back and forth, chewing on his thumbnail and sending nervous glances at the closed bedroom door. "Bet he wasn't so nervous when I was born," I quip, taking a moment to catch my breath and gather my courage.

"I think he may have been worse," Leggy answers, watching his best friend. "You had the finest midwife in Mirkwood."

Patting Haldir's shoulder, I continue on into the bedroom where Andi is lying on the large bed, squeezing her poor handmaiden's hand as tightly as she can. The blonde's face is tomato red and wisps of blonde hair stuck to her from the sweat, brows scrunched together and teeth grinding as she struggles through another contraction. The midwife knelt at her feet, demanding another hard push. Knowing my job, I move to place the warm linens I held next to a basin of warm

water, ignoring the way my hands are shaking.

"I'm gonna kill him," Andrea shrieks around a sob, her free hand gripping the sheet underneath her. She'll be pissed once she recovers, those sheets were brand new and she could only get them from Rohan; Æómer had given them to her just last month when he stopped by before going to visit his sister and Faramir. "I'm gonna bury him, dig him up, and kill him all over again!"

"Want me to go get Adar and make your work easier," I ask, looking at her over my shoulder. The baby would be here any time now and I know that I wanted Haldir with me last year. She nods quickly, eyes clenched shut as she let out a low moan.

"Men are not allowed inside," the midwife states with a disapproving look in my direction. I square my shoulders and gain the haughty expression I've seen Thranduil make whenever I argue with him, smirking a little when it makes the other woman blush and focus back on my best friend.

"You just worry about getting my sibling and best friend through this safely while I focus on my idiot father." Proud that I managed to sound completely collected and not the bundle of nerves that I am, I push the door open, grab Aragorn by the back of his shirt collar, and yank him inside before kicking the door shut behind us. "Go comfort your wife."

He's gone ashen, pale gray eyes fixed on Andrea as the tremor in his hands picks up again. Honestly, it's a miracle that men have survived this long given how they get squeamish at the simplest of things. It's because he's vowed to protect Andi the best he can, but childbirth is something that's out of his hands and he's absolutely terrified of it.

"Men are notâ€" I cut him off with just a look, pointing towards my crying friend. "Of course, there are exceptions." His shaking increases as he mumbles under his breath, "sleep-deprived, knife-wielding daughters being the largest one." Andrea lets out another loud scream of pain, drawing his complete attention. "I'm here, Andrea." He untangles her hand from the sheet and holds it in both of his while I grab a simple white linen to clean the baby off once it arrives. "You can do this, Mel, just a few more pushes."

Then a new cry echoed in the room, strong and nearly as loud as Andi's. Carefully as I can, I help to clean the baby before wrapping it in a pale blue blanket; made of soft satin and warm fur to protect it from the chill in the air.

"It's a boy," I grin, with a relieved smile. Andrea lets out a breathless laugh, smiling at her husband and releasing her poor handmaiden. The baby's cries slow and turn into content noises, my baby brother looking around curiously as I cradle him in my arms. "Hey, little man. You're so cute, I bet you'll be an awesome baby brother." I continue the quiet talking as I cross the room to Andi's side of the bed. "You wanna see your adar and mommy? She worked really hard to get you here and she's excited to see you." Aragorn gently takes him from me, matching expressions of pure awe on Andi and Aragorn's face as they stare down at the newborn. "What are you gonna name my baby brother?"

"Samwell," Andi answers, smoothing down the tuft of light brown hair on her son's head. She laughs softly at Samwell's big yawn, tears gathering and making her pale blue eyes shine. "Come here, Ash." I sit on the edge of the bed, smiling down at my family.

The storm outside rages on, but all was calm inside the Citadel.

~ONE WEEK LATER~

Aside from my handmaiden, the throne room is empty for the first time this week; no more confused guests that were lost or wanting to pay their respects or Dwarves with small trinkets for the new Prince. Adar and my husband had ridden out to meet our newest guest around fifteen minutes ago, so I shouldn't have to occupy the hard throne for too much longer; it's an uncomfortable thing, not even the velvet cushion offering much of a break.

"King Elessar should be back soon, Princess," Elara assures me and I nod absently, shifting in my seat and kicking my legs back and forth. Elara proves correct as the sound of hooves on cobblestones reach my ears soon enough before they divert to the stables. From the amount sound, I can conclude that a lot of people have arrived to celebrate little Sammy's birth and they would stay for a few extra days to rest themselves. A few minutes later, the great doors of the throne room open and a large procession of Elves and Men enter the Citadel with my adar at the front, a none too pleased look on his face. Something happened that he doesn't like and that means bad news for the rest of us. "My King," Elara curtsies and then helps me to stand.

"Elara," Aragorn nods in acknowledgment, "why don't you go find Haldir and Andrea, tell them to meet us in the council chamber." _Great, with this much walking I'll lose the extra fat from Ariel's birth sooner than I'd thought._ I barely reach the others when a woman shoots forward, her hands on her narrow hips with a disapproving look. Her auburn hair falls in soft waves down to her hips, half of it braided intricately in the style of the Elves, her brown eyes seem to see through me into my soul and then I realize exactly who the lady is when she opens her mouth.

"Why exactly is Larien dressed in men's clothing?" I raise an eyebrow at Adar, lips pursed. He gulps, knowing that my look means he was in deeper shit than he had originally thought. "You're supposed to be a king now; the least you could do is make sure she has proper clothing!"

My mother has returned and good Lord is that lady pissed.

2. Raging Mothers and Unexpected Guests

ANDREA

I never realized how exhausting it was to be a mom, but now I really wish mine was in this world so I could hug her. I mean, the only people I can ask for advice are my two friends—“an idiot that spends his days hunting and a woman that's as exhausted as I am. Sure, Ariel's a one year old now, but she still doesn't sleep through the night. It wasn't long ago that Ash and I were crying along with the

kids until the nursemaids took pity on us. Of course, Aragorn's been a lot of help, thrilled to be raising a kid without running from Orcs or Goblins.

Hell, I'm just glad there are no outlets here for Sammy to stick a fork in!

I make it to the nursery and let out a groan when I spot Haldir and Elara, their expressions alone telling me I'm not gonna like what they're about to tell me. _Would any newcomers go away if I told them we're booked to capacity?_ "Aragorn wants us in the council chamber," Haldir explains, grasping my arm and making me turn to walk in the direction I just came from. "Someone important has just arrived and we're needed to greet them."

"Fantastic," I grumble, tugging my arm free and following behind them. People have been gathering in the Citadel since just before I gave birth, ready for the party where Aragorn and I would announce the name of our baby to the kingdom. Most had showed up for Ariel's party last year, but even more have showed up for the birth of the Prince. I just hope Kharl doesn't try to knock Thranduil out again when the Elf makes a snotty comment about the amount of Hobbits. Being the Queen means I can't join in and kick the fucker; something about setting a good example and all that. _It really sucks not being able to kick people's asses anymore_. I force Haldir to stop when we make it to the council chambers, staring at the double doors with some apprehension when I notice the way that the Elf and woman have gone a bit tense.

"Who's so special that they deserve a private audience with all of us?"

"Andrea," Haldir starts with a wince, "I just think we should do this fast." I know that phrase far too well after several basketball injuries and that time my shoulder dislocated before Sammy was conceived. '_Do it fast like ripping off a Band-Aid_', but nothing was good when that phrase was uttered and I was usually sore for a week afterwards.

"Haldir, who's in there?" I use my firm tone, the one that gets people to spill their guts the instant I stop talking. Haldir pressed his lips into a firm line and Elara keeps her head down, glad to be forgotten as I focus the full force of my Mom Stare on the Elf. After an impressive moment of silence, he lets it all out in one huff of air.

"Aragorn's ex-wife; please don't kill the messenger."

* * *

><p>I glare across the table at Ashley's mother, taking a squirming Samwell from his nursemaid; Enelya ignores the look with ease, giving my husband a glare of her own that nearly matched mine in its intensity. "Well," Ash states to break the silence, "this is way more awkward than I thought it would be." Enelya's glare turns to Ash, but unlike the others, she doesn't wilt under it. She's had several years of practice dealing with me while we pulled all-nighters without caffeine, so I doubt anyone apart from Voldemort could scare her at this point.

"Learn your place, Larien," the Elleth snaps with her hard brown eyes trained on my friend," do not speak unless spoken to." _Oh, hell nah. This bitch did not even try to pull that card after everything we've all been through_. Ash's eyes flick in my direction, as though looking for confirmation that she could unleash her inner bitch. I give her an encouraging grin and nodded at her to have at it, then her eyes locked with the womb warmer's, her voice even and calm when she spoke.

"You're one to talk since you mean nothing here." Aragorn's eyes widen a fraction and I can feel how tense he is when I cover one of his hands with mine. "You may well be the woman that gave birth to me, but that doesn't make you my mother; that title goes to the woman that gave up everything to raise me, something you couldn't be bothered to do considering you ran off to hide behind Thranduil's skirts. You left Adar and me to die at the hands of Orcs! So you don't have a voice at this table, you don't have authority in this kingdom, you don't have shit."

Haldir's blue eyes shine with pride even as he places a calming hand on his wife's shoulder and I can't help but feel giddy since I taught her the best way to make people fear you is to keep your voice tightly controlled and deadly. Enelya's cheeks have flushed red in her indignation and embarrassment, the dainty hands resting on the tabletop curled into fists and shaking. Ashley takes a few deep breaths and relaxes back in her seat, sending a wink in my direction with a smugness I've never seen surrounding her.

With a growl, Enelya shoves away from the table and storms out of the council chamber, leaving everyone else in her dust.

"Well," I state after a moment of silence," I think that went just dandy." From my spot at the table, I'm able to take in the shocked expressions of the others in attendance and Thranduil's expression of offense is the best by far.

"I do not wear skirts," he corrects Ash with a sniff," these are robes and you'd do well to learn the distinction." I snort at that, eyeing the pale silver robes he was clothed in, the black of his trousers barely showing. _At least he's not wearing that orange cloak this time_. That had been a catastrophe of epic proportions, the Elf freaking out after Ariel spilled mashed bananas all over it and rubbed it into the silk with way too much glee for a kid her age.

"Do we have any other business to discuss or can little man and I go catch a nap?" After spending most of the night in the nursery, I was ready to drop and I'm holding out for a miracle that Sammy's tired as well."

"There has been talk about something magical building in the woods near here," Legolas pipes up, leaning forward a little to catch Aragorn's eyes from his spot next to me. "Alistair said it felt a bit like a portal that hasn't reached completion yet." Alistair had been trained by Radagast when he showed signs of magical potential, but he mainly served as a healer in the lower levels of Minas Tirith.

"Think we could use that portal to get Dominoes?" Ash grins widely at the idea, tugging absently on a loose strand of auburn hair that had

come loose from the braid.

"Oh yeah," she nods, " just tell the delivery boy to chunk it through the glowing portal of death and we'll just not pay him."

"Marvelous." Legolas arches a fine, blonde brow at that, blue eyes flicking between Ash and I to see if we were done for the moment. In all honesty, pizza sounded like a dream come true and I've found myself dreaming about a large pepperoni pizza more than my own husband lately. Completely pathetic though it may be, this girl needs her food. I like my lips, almost able to taste the grease as my eyes closed and a moan escaped.

"Naneth," a shrill voice calls from outside the doors, " come in!" Ash rises and crosses the room as quickly as she could without running, opening one door partly before scooping up the person on the other side, carrying the unexpected guest with her back to her seat. Ariel Callaghan was a chunky little thing with pink cheeks and curling blonde hair, her complexion tanned from the hours she passes outside with all of us, and she has a beautiful dimpled grin for everyone she meets. "Shh," she shushes with one tiny finger brought up to her lips.

"That's right, _OrÃ«,_" Haldir nods, using Ariel's nickname and making the toddler giggle. It meant _heart_, which definitely fit since she'd already wormed her way into that organ in a metaphorical sense; Haldir and Aragorn were wrapped around her little finger and she was showered with presents whenever Sam and the others dropped by. She was spoiled rotten and I loved the little Princess almost as much as I loved my own baby. Ariel's brown eyes land on Thranduil and she gives him a bright grin.

"Thrandy!"

Naneth means mother in Elvish (according to a website I found, so who knows) and OrÃ« means Heart, which I got from _The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-Earth_ by Ruth S. Noel.

3. Sleepless Nights and Obnoxious Elleths

ASHLEY

The next few days seem to drag by, Enelya judging everything I do from the way I refused to wear dresses all the way to how I wiped food off my face; the constant staring kept me on edge and wound up, and I suddenly understood how my real mom felt whenever I called my papa to come pick me up because I thought she was being mean. Of course, I was five back then and the mean things my mom did mainly consisted of changing the TV from cartoons to the evening news and my papa and nana only kept me for a few hours before sending me home again. It doesn't help that I have to keep an eye on Kharl to make sure he doesn't kill Enelya in publicâ€”the scandal would last decades and it's so hard to bury bodies. The first time he saw her as he walked in for lunch, he nearly fell right out of his chair at how similar the bitch and I look, but then I saw the rage darken his green eyes and the way his hand had twitched as though he itched to have his pistol in hand.

In short, it sucked royal ass.

In just two days the big feast will be held in Samwell's honor and then the Citadel would be emptied of guests, apart from the Hobbits, and we could have peace again. As it is, Haldir is away on guard duty and I've been left to tend to our daughter, a daughter who only wanted her adar whenever she woke in the middle of the night. Her shrill cry wakes me with a start and I start for her room with a small cry of my own, picking her up and wincing as she makes it clear that I'm not her father by trying to wriggle away.

"Adar," she whines, looking over my shoulder and wiggling her fingers in the direction of the bedroom, "want my adar!"

"I know, baby, your adar's an asshole for leaving us," I tell her softly, holding her hand in mine and swaying with her in my arms. She didn't quiet down, but she did stop squirming and rested her chin on my shoulder. I feel like an absolute failure since I can't even get Ariel to stop crying, like I'm not worthy to call her my daughter given how much of a daddy's girl she's turned out to be. I hear a louder cry from down the hall and decide to go visit my friend who was having similar baby problems. In Sammy's nursery I find Andrea sitting cross-legged on the rug in front of the hearth, my brother in her arms, and a pitiful whine coming from her mouth.

"He won't go back to sleep," she pouts, "all he wants to do is fuss at me like I did something wrong."

"Have you tried singing or babbling?" She nods, looking at me as I join her on the floor. "Ariel's the same way. I hope they haven't caught a bug or something." That's the last thing I need right now with my mother breathing down my neck. As if reading each other's thoughts, both babies begin their crying all over again, this time at a higher pitch. "God, this is the worst night yet." I'm almost ready to cry with them.

"If the Doctor were here the babies would be quiet in an instant."

"Babies smell fear, and right now I'm pretty sure I'm rank with it." Andi nods, looking down at her son and desperately thinking of anything that would quiet him down. "Where's Adar?"

"I made him stay in bed, he has that council meeting tomorrow that he has to attend and it wouldn't be good if he face-planted the table in a dead sleep because Sammy kept him up all night." I guess that's a good point. "What songs have you tried on her?"

"Nothing yet, she just woke up again. What about you?"

"The usual lullabies that we grew up with, I even broke down and sang the coconut song."

"You know, we could go a slightly different routeâ€¦" She looks at me, eyebrows raised and nodding for me to continue. "Tarzan works sometimes on them, maybe now will be no different." The blonde pauses, looking down at Sammy and silently pleading with the infant to just shut up and go back to sleep. "You wanna risk it?"

"What other choice do we have?"

"_Come stop your crying, it will be alright_," we sing in unison, our voices barely more than whispers," _just take my hand, hold it tight. I will protect you from all around you, I will be here don't you cry. For one so small, you seem so strong; my arms will hold you, keep you safe and warm_." Both babies calm down slightly at the change in lullaby, their eyes watching us with a whimper escaping every now and again. I smile down at my daughter as Ariel lets out a small yawn, her eyes half open. "_This bond between us can't be broken, I will be here, don't you cry_." Andrea falters slightly as our babies slowly fall into the sweet darkness of sleep. "'Cause you'll be in my heartâ€"yes, you'll be in my heartâ€"|"_" Our singing slows as our own eyes begin to drift shut. "_Fromâ€"|.This day onâ€"|.Nowâ€"|.Andâ€"|"_"

And then I was sleeping and nothing else existed in the world except my dreams.

ARAGORN

The next morning Aragorn wakes to find Andrea's side of the bed unslept in and the door leading into their son's nursery wide open. _Has she spent all night in there? He pulls on his clothing for the day and walks into the nursery expecting to find his wife bending over their son's crib to change him and his daughter occupying the rocking chair with his granddaughter cradled in her arms, but what he found was completely different. Curled up on the floor in front of the hearth is Andrea with Samwell snuggled up into her side, his thumb in his mouth; leaning against the rocking chair bedside them is Lariel with Ariel laying spread eagle across her lap.

He smiles at all of them, wishing he had one of those camera things that the women were always talking about because, in the words of his daughter, this is truly a Kodak moment. Quietly, he moves to pick up his son, careful not to wake him before settling the infant in the crib and covering him up; next he picks Ariel up and places her in the smaller bed near the crib meant for the nursemaid, making sure _OrÃ«_ was tucked in and comfortable.

Now for the difficult part, he thinks as he faces the two women he loves so much. Aragorn picks his wife up easily, carrying her back to their bed and laying her down on her side before bringing his daughter in and putting her on his side and covering them both up. This would work well enough until the women woke up on their own for the day. Nodding with satisfaction, he leaves the room and shuts the door behind him, giving the nursemaid an order not to disturb Andi or Lariel no matter what happens. He didn't care if Sauron suddenly came back and sacked the city, there was no way he was going to deal with a cranky wife-daughter duo unless he had no other choice. In fact, he'd prefer Sauron to that.

Enelya and Kharl are the only ones at the table for breakfast that morning, the others either enjoying the city or still sleeping. There was no denying that his ex-wife was beautiful and that Lariel got many of her features, but unlike Lariel, there was no warmth in the Elleth. "Aragorn," Kharl greets around a mouthful of eggs.

"Kharl," Aragorn nods, taking his place at the head of the table and studiously ignoring Enelya's glare.

"Where is our daughter," she questions irritably. "Surely you do not permit her to sleep this late when there is a council meeting soon?"

"Ariel kept her awake most of the night, she deserves to miss one meeting to catch up on her sleep." _It's not like you were an early riser when Larien was Ariel's age and you didn't even get up with her in the night. _Aragorn takes a long drink of wine, knowing he would need much more of it if he was to put up with Enelya all day. After a moment of silence, Aragorn looks up from his plate to watch Kharl push eggs around his plate with a fork. Kharl McGee was completely human with a love of nature, spending most of his days out in the woods or with the soldiers running drills. The rare days he was confined inside the Citadel were spent in Ariel's nursery or in the kitchen, and Aragorn could see the longing in Kharl's green eyes whenever he looked at the children. He has a son in that other world, a son that had no idea where Kharl is. Aragorn could understand how Kharl felt in that regard, he'd had to go an entire eighteen years before Larien returned.

"So," Kharl says, leaning back in his chair with his goblet of spiced wine in hand," how'd you two meet?" Enelya's dark eyes flick to Aragorn for a second before they returned to her plate. Aragorn wasn't touching that subject for the rest of his life if he could help it, it wasn't one that he was proud of. "Oh, come on! You must have a decent story that you're willing to tell."

"We don't." Kharl rolls his eyes skyward at Aragorn's answer, shaking his head just the slightest bit. "Why don't you tell me how you and my daughter met instead?"

"We met in Pre-School, that's education classes for four year olds, and we just sort of got along." He shrugs with an easy smile at the memory. "She, uh, she refused to leave a corner of our classroom because she missed her mom and I felt bad since it was her first day at a new school, so I went and sat next to her. We talked about cartoons for hours and eventually I got her to come sit by me and draw dragons."

"She didn't have a mother in that world," Enelya snaps, eyes locking with Kharl's.

"No, she had two loving parents there." Kharl's voice, much like Larien's had been, was completely calm, but the anger burning in his eyes was enough to have Aragorn on edge. Nothing good happened when Kharl was that angry and he really didn't want to explain Enelya's violent murder to Thranduil. "They taught her everything she knows, they loved her more than anything, and they kept her safe. The only one in _this_ world worthy of being her parent is sitting right there." Kharl points in Aragorn's direction without taking his eyes off Enelya. "So you can fuck off." He leaves after that, taking his plate and goblet with him.

"He can't talk to me like that!" With a snort, Aragorn stands up with his goblet in hand, starting for the doors at the other end of the hall.

"He just did," he murmurs just loud enough for the Elleth to hear, grinning broadly when he hears her indignant screech.

4. Portals in the Forest

ANDREA

After waking up to snuggling with Ashley, a little time out of the Citadel was a nice break even if Ash and I are just riding our horses through the woods. My mare keeps pace easily with Thalion, the soft sound of hooves on dirt bringing back memories of when I first started riding and of the encouraging grins I got from my uncle Tom. "Do you think we'll have to go back soon?"

"Who knows," I reply quietly, blue eyes trained on the path ahead of us. "Pippin and his bunch will be here this afternoon, so we should get back sometime before then." Sam and Rosie had arrived last night after Ash and I passed out and I can't wait to tell him that I named my baby after him—"well, partially anyway. "When the kids are a little older, you and I should spend a week or so in the Shire."

"That would be perfect! I mean, think about it, you don't have to wear shoes and there's always a ton of food." I laugh along with my best friend at that, agreeing wholeheartedly with everything. It would be great to just laze around all day in comfortable clothing with food not too far out of reach and some Hobbits to keep me entertained with stories of their crops. "You know what I miss the most from the other world?"

"Hmm?"

"WiFi." I nod with understanding, missing the days when I could just Google a question instead of asking fifty different people that all had different answers to it. It's gonna suck if Samwell gets sick because I can't even look up his symptoms or take him to a real doctor. Oh God, what if he gets the flu and there's no proper medicine here? "Hey, whoa, you okay?"

"We don't have real doctors," I answer, voice high in my panic as my breathing speeds up. "What are we supposed to do if our babies get sick or-or if they have asthma like you do? They're doomed here!" Ash makes her horse come to a stop before grabbing my reigns and making Indiana come to a stop as well. "Wh-what are we supposed to—" I trail off, looking to my friend with wide eyes.

"Andi, it's gonna be alright," she soothes, using her free hand to squeeze my shoulder. "We have the best physician in Minas Tirith living in our house and our babies will be fine."

"I'm supposed to be the calm one." I'm almost sobbing by this point, scared to death that Sammy will get sick and I won't be able to help him.

"I know, it's freaking me out too, but it's fine." We stay like that for a few minutes, Ash making soothing noises and rubbing my arm while I try and collect myself. "Shh, it's okay, Andi, it'll all be okay."

"I hate crying!"

"I know, but it's only me and we've cried in front of each other

before." I really hate how true that is, but we were both under stress from school and our jobs and it usually led to us curled up on the couch with a tub of ice cream and Pirates of the Caribbean playing on the TV to cheer us up. _Too bad we don't have that here because today would be perfect for it_. "Come on, let's get down and find a nice tree to sit under." Indiana makes a quiet noise as I dismount and I can't help a pitiful giggle when nudges me with his snout.

"I'll be okay, boy." Ash hands the reigns over to me as she dismounts, surprisingly graceful given that she'd never been the best with horses until just two or so years ago. "I know a spot over here; Aragorn would take me here when he wanted to escape politics."

"God, Sammy wasn't conceived over here, was he?"

"No, you dork," I snort, still wiping at my wet cheeks with one hand. "He was made in a bed like Ariel was."

"Actually, I'm pretty sure I was against a wall when that one happened." I stop and send my friend a look, smiling wider at her blush and at the way she avoided looking at me. "What? I'm impatient and Haldir's surprisingly strong for an Elf." She clears her throat awkwardly and makes me laugh despite my earlier panic, her shyness having surprising timing.

"How is it you feel awkward telling me about your sex life, but not when you told me, in _detail_, about that honey incident you and Marek shared?" Marek James is her ex-fiancÃ© and everyone thought those two would be together forever after they met at a party his frat house was hosting, but she broke up with him after we graduated college.

"That was totally different."

"Only because you and Marek weren't completely naked in that storage room." Her blush deepens and she starts walking again, though it was easy for me to keep up with her since my legs are longer. "Okay, sweetie, we've been in battle together, defeated a giant eyeball of doom, and taken care of Kharl when he was stupid drunk that one time, so sex isn't something to be shy about."

"I know, it's a completely natural thing that most people do, but that doesn't make talking about it with anyone that's not my husband a little weird." I just continue to smile as we walk, the familiar sounds of small animals and deer creating a soothing atmosphere that helped to relax me. "Do you think I'll be like my mother?" I look over at her, finding her chewing on her bottom lip with her brows furrowed.

"You're more like Aragorn than you realize; for one, you wouldn't just abandon your baby unless you had absolutely no other choice. You may share some of her features, but that's all you share with that _thing_."

"Thanks, Andi."

"Eh, what's us step-moms for if we can't help out our step-kids from time to time?" We both make a face immediately after that and I shudder. "Okay, next time I say something like that, smack me hard so

I can forget all about it."

"I'll smack the blonde off of ya." The hairs on the backs of my arms stand on end as we move further in the woods, but I just put it down to the shifting weather. Summer storms were nothing new here and I figure we'll have a lot of lightning tonight, but as long as it's clear tomorrow afternoon for the party, then I don't care. "You feel that?"

"It's probably nothing." Ash nods and looks up at the sky, both of us noting the dark gray clouds rolling in quickly. "Maybe we should head back early?"

"That'd probably be best." She had moved a few feet forward so she could turn Thalion around, but then the static-y feeling grows stronger, pushing me backwards right as a bright flash made me cover my eyes with a shout, tripping over my own feet and landing hard on the ground. When I blink away the dark spots, there's no one else on the path with me except for Indiana, the spot where Ash had just been replaced with a swirling vortex the size of a small child. _Great, now I have to explain to my husband that I lost his only daughter. How the hell could this day get any worse?_ As if hearing my thoughts, freezing sheets of rain begin to pour down on me.

"Worst luck ever."

5. Wobbly Wobbly Timey Wimey Stuff

ASHLEY

It took a while for me to open my eyes, almost afraid of what I would see considering last time this happened I ended up surrounded by Hobbits. Would I still be in Minas Tirith; would I be in Gondor at all? "Normal women don't just fall out of the sky," a deep voice declared, masculine and somewhat familiar. _Have I angered him before? Maybe I stayed in Gondor after all if he sounds familiar to me_.

"I never said this woman was normal," another man reasoned, this voice elegant and familiar. _Gandy_. I open my eyes a crack, peering around me and taking in the group of men standing just off to my right, all of them have gathered around Gandy and hold weapons of some kind. Most of them barely reached Gandalf's waist and the smallest one had a mop of dark blonde hair.

"She fell out of the sky, Gandalf! It is witchcraft if nothing else!" The guy talking had long black hair with a few streaks of gray running through it, dressed in leather and fur of fine quality, and had a sword strapped across his broad back. Wasn't bad looking all things considered, but he was still calling me a witch. I open my eyes completely and sit up with a wince, rubbing my aching back.

"I'll have you know that I'm a bit more important than a common witch," I remark, enjoying the way all of their heads snapped in my direction. "I'm the Crown Princess of Gondor and I'm also taller than you are, so I'll have some respect." His blue eyes narrow at me, his chin raised in a way that Enelya had done several times whenever I'd threatened her. It was usually followed by her storming off, but this

guy had nowhere to go unless he wanted to walk further through the woods.

"Gondor has only a Steward, so do not think you can fool us, _witch_." He practically spat the words out, tone haughty and authoritative. Forgetting my pain for a moment, I stand and glare down at him, hand resting on the hilt of the short sword Adar had given me before we headed out to Helm's Deep.

"You listen to me, you little shit," I snarl, jabbing a finger against his chest, "I haven't gone through an entire fucking battle against the Dark Lord or almost lost my entire family just to have some random _asshat_ tell me that Gondor has only a Steward!" I turn on Gandalf now, glaring up at him with just as much intensity. "Now tell me how the hell I ended up here and poof me back to my daughter or nobody is going to be happy!" Gandalf's bushy gray brows furrow over his blue eyes as he stares down at me, mumbling under his breath.

"You must have hit you head harder than we thought if you think Isildur's line is still intact, woman." I keep my back to the Dwarf, but my hands clench tightly into fists, sharp nails biting into the palms of my hands. "What is she going on about, Gandalf?"

"It appears she is not from this time," Gandy answers after a moment, tilting my head up with a finger under my chin. "You look extraordinarily like a young Elleth I'm acquainted with; do you happen to be related to someone named Enelya?" I slap his hand away and shuffle my boots, glad that I'd been wearing my breeches and simple tunic when the magic happened.

"She's my mother," I confirm without hesitation, "if you can call the woman that abandoned me that." The Wizard gives me a nod, chewing on the end of his pipe as I look around us. It was woods on either side, a simple path dividing it in two, made up of hard-packed earth; there were at least fourteen people not counting Gandy and myself, and just as many ponies. "What's happened, Gandalf? Why am I here?"

"By the way I figure it, you're from several years in the future and seem to have stumbled upon a portal that transported you here. If you really are who you say you are, then we must definitely keep you safe considering who your father may be. He _is_ who I am thinking, isn't he?"

"His name isâ€¦" I trail off, biting my lip as I try and remember what he went by before the Fellowship was made. "Strider, he's one of the Rangers." Gandalf's thin lips purse together as he nods again, tapping his staff against the path absently as he thought things through. "Can't you just summon a portal to send me back? For crying out loud, you're the White Wizard."

"No he's not," someone corrects, coming to the front of the group. It's a Hobbit, the top of his head barely hitting my stomach as I look down at him, taking in the familiar clothes from the Shire and his curly hair. "He said the White Wizard was somebody else." I turn back to the Wizard, just now noticing that he was back in his gray robes and that his long hair was just as gray.

"Well I'll be damned, you ain't a zombie yet."

"We have not yet met either," he adds with a hint of a smile.
"Perhaps you could introduce yourself to us, so we don't have to call you 'woman' all the time."

"My name's Ashley and, apparently, I'm remarkably good at finding random portals in normal ass places that anyone can stumble through." I kick at the dirt in frustration, letting out a huff of air that blew some of my auburn hair out of my face. "You guys really should work on portal placements, maybe put up a big sign to warn people." At his confused look, I explain further. "A portal took me away from here when Orcs were chasing me and my father, and a portal brought me and two of my friends here, like, eighteen years later. Not a nice way to travel, by the way, knocks you smooth the hell out."

"Do you always talk so much," the Dwarf from before asks irritably, sending a dark, brooding look my way. That look alone made me realize who he was and I snap my fingers, pointing at him with a smile.

"Guy of Gisborne!"

"No."

"No? Well, do you have a twin or something?" He gives a shake of his head, still glowering away. If this was a cartoon, then I'm almost certain that he'd have his own rain cloud hanging over his head, rumbling with thunder and letting out occasional bolts of lightning. "Damn, boy, can you possibly be angrier or are you trying to beat Loki for the title of Gloomiest Ass in the World?"

"You should watch your tongue, woman."

"My adar's been telling me that for almost two years, he didn't get through to me, so don't think you will either, short stuff." Honestly, these guys are the tallest Dwarves I've ever seen, the tallest one nearly the same height as me while the grumpy one is even with my nose. "So, where are we going?" Grumpy and Gandy share a look, communicating the same way Kharl and I do without saying a word. After a few angry facial expressions, Grumpy faces me again.

"Erebor, have you heard of it?"

"Nope, but I'm sure I'll hear all about it on the way there."

"No, I will not have a woman on this journey." He turns to Gandy again, pointing one thick finger in his direction. "It's too dangerous and you know it."

"Not as dangerous as battling Orcs dozens of times, not as dangerous as riding into battle against Sauron, and it's certainly not as dangerous as the time I survived a Balrog." All eyes were on me again, the Hobbit's eyes gone wide with surprise. "I'm good at surviving, so no need to worry." There was a loud whinny seconds before I spotted my horse galloping my way, stopping just shy of me and nudging my shoulder with his head. "Easy, Thalion, it's alright." I murmur to him in Elvish, stroking his mane until he calmed down.

"You're an Elf then?"

"Not likely," I snort, pushing back some of my hair to reveal ears with only the faintest bit of a point. "My mother's an Elf, but my father's one of the Dunedain and so am I; I've just spent a good hunk of my life around Elves. My husband and daughter are Elves, so watch what you say about them." Grumpy had an expression of disgust on display as his pale eyes lock with my brown ones. "You know, you're not that first Dwarf I've met that has a hatred of the Elves, but you are the first one I've met that's brave enough to look disgusted at the thought of my baby being one. If you got a problem with a child you've never met, my child, say it now and prepare to meet your god because I'll send you there with a flick of my wrist, old man!"

"I have no qualms with the child, it's not her fault that her mother has poor taste."

"I'll have you know that my husband is one of the bravest men I've ever met; he fought in a war because he knew I was fighting and he loves me, he's braved so many obstacles, most of those caused by my brother, just so he could stay with me for the rest of my days. Can you say that, huh? Do not insult my family or, I promise, I'll show you one of the ways I've survived the last two and a half years." He continues to scowl up at me, but Gandy rests a wrinkled hand on my shoulder, his stern expression alone telling me to calm down. "Let's get this adventure over with so I can go home."

"Gandalf, are you sure we cannot leave her here? I'm sure she could find a portal back to her own timeline." I meet Gandy's eyes, pointing down at the Dwarf as I speak.

"I'm gonna shove a boot somewhere he'd find very unpleasant if you don't muzzle him."

6. Another Long Journey

ANDREA

"How do you lose an entire human being," Kharl demands as he paces the Council Chamber, tugging at his thick hair as he talks, "and a fucking horse on top of that!" I roll my eyes and drop down into a chair, my blanket wrapped firmly around me to keep me warm. The rain hasn't let up yet and I'm still soaking wet, but I came straight here to tell everyone what had happened.

"I thought Alistair said that the portal wasn't even formed yet," Aragorn says from his spot behind my chair, gray eyes staring unseeingly at the wall across from us. "How could it have formed so quickly and pulled Lariel through it?" I shrug, teeth chattering as I used my limited magic to make the flames in the hearth burn hotter. "And where did it take her?"

"And how do we get my sister back?"

"We'll figure it out," Legolas states confidently, holding Ariel in his arms while Haldir was searching the woods in case she had just been transported to some other part of the grounds. Ariel's eyes were red and puffy from crying, her bottom lip still wobbling as she whimpered. Leggy murmurs to her in Elvish to calm her down, something Ash and Haldir did as well, the language associated with soft voices

and safety.

"How is she going to protect herself? I mean, I've always been with her through the thick of things and I don't want that to change now." I lower my eyes to my feet, one boot missing and the other coated in mud from the long sprint back here. I don't remember losing a shoe, but I can hardly remember anything that happened after Ash disappeared. "She needs me, Aragorn, I'm her brother."

"And I'm her father," Aragorn returns in a carefully controlled voice, "do you not think I share your concern and pain? Because I feel it ten-fold. I shouldn't have let them go in the forest when we weren't sure about the portal, I should have been there at the very least. It's my job to protect my children and I keep failing." Fighting back tears of my own, I rise and wrap my arms around his waist in a hug, holding him tightly as I feel his shoulders beginning to shake in his crying.

"It's not anyone's fault," I say after a moment, swallowing hard, "it wasn't even the portal that Alistair was investigating, but I know Ash and I know she can make it back to us." After a moment's hesitation, Kharl comes over and rests a calloused hand on Aragorn's shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

"She'll be alright; she has to be."

"She's the second stubbornness woman I know," Kharl confirms with a small laugh, "she'll fight her way back if only to add to her bragging rights. If I know her, and I like to think I'm an expert at this point, she's already found someone that'll help her find another portal."

ASHLEY

"How much longer," I groan from my spot on Thalion's back, my butt hurting worse than it has in a while.

"Remember how I told you I didn't know earlier," Balin asks as he looks at me over his shoulder. "I've received no news since then about an exact date." I scowl at the white-haired Dwarf, shifting in the hard saddle and wishing for the tenth time in the past six minutes that this hadn't happened. Thalion seems to share my discomfort, his muscles tensing occasionally when one of the ponies makes a noise or comes too close.

"Easy." I pat his neck comfortingly, smiling a little when I feel him relax again, his ears twitching. We ride for another few miles with only a small amount of talking until we come upon the decaying remains of someone's home, Thorin bringing our group to a halt as he turns his pony to face us.

"We'll camp here tonight," he calls out, holding up one hand to ensure he had everyone's attention. _Thank the Valar_. My ass is sore and my legs are cramped, so I can't help the noise of relief that slips out when my feet hit the ground. KÃ-li and FÃ-li share matching grins, the type of grins I've seen on Merry and Pippin's faces right before they did something that got them in trouble by Gandyâ€usually a small prank to try and lift the mood that ended badly.

"No," I state in a firm tone, pointing at each of them with my Mom

expression in place," do it and you'll have a boot up your asses." The grins remain in place until Thorin's gaze lands on the brothers, then they disappear quicker than I'd thought was possible.

"Ashley, you and the boys look after the ponies and don't wander away from them." When his back was turned, I make a face and mimic him silently, quickly trying to look busy when he turns abruptly, pointing one thick finger my way. "Watch it or I'll have you dig a hole the size of Gandalf."

"With what, my good looks?"

"You have two perfectly good hands."

"Don't tempt him," FÃ-li starts as he and his brother come to stand on either side of me.

"Yeah," KÃ-li finishes, "we dug until our mother cuffed his ear when she found out; our hands were red for months."

"Didn't think I was ever going to grow my pinky nail back." FÃ-li wiggles the pinky of his right hand for emphasis, pouting as he stared at it. I frown at that, sending a dark look in Thorin's direction that he returns one of his own. If he tries to make me do that, then I'll stuff his ass in the hole before filling it back up. King or not, I was raised not to take shit from anybody, which is why I was nearly suspended from college. Apparently it's frowned upon to throw books at your history professor's fat head, but he had it coming. "C'mon, then, let's get this over and done with."

"Maybe we can find a stream or something to wash our faces in." The fact that he sounded so hopeful had me remembering the six long months it took us to defeat Sauron and how few of those months were spent clean. Together, the three of us gather the reigns and lead the ponies and my stallion towards the woods, walking until we find some felled trees that were perfect to tie the reigns to. It wasn't too far from the others, but just far enough that we couldn't hear them if they weren't shouting and vice versa. Thalion seemed at ease with the ponies now, nudging Myrtle from time to time like he'd done with Indiana. "So, what's the future like, Ashley?"

"Relaxing," I answer, wincing as I sit on the thick trunk of one of the trees, drawing my knees up to my chest and resting my chin on them, arms wrapped around my legs. "I live in Minas Tirith with my family and my little brother's naming ceremony is tomorrow."

"Do you know what it will be," FÃ-li asks, sitting next to me and bumping me with one broad shoulder, making me grin.

"His mother named him Samwell in honor of a good friend that helped save her life."

"She isn't your mother, too?" I shake my head quickly and shudder, the expression on my face making the other two laugh.

"Nah, she's my best friend and she married my adar two years ago; name's Andrea, but I always call her Andi. I've known her since we were both five, we fought and we've pretty much been close ever since then." I smile fondly at the memory, remembering how angry our principal had been when we were drug into her office.

"What's your baby's name," KÃ-li asks next, sitting on the damp grass in front of his brother and me. "It's a little girl, right?"

"Her name's Ariel, but _nÃ©n herven_ and Adar both call her _OrÃ©_, which is Sindarin for heart." I blink back tears as I think of my family, my chest aching and my heart jumping up in my throat. I missed them so much and I've barely been away a few hours at most, so how will I make it until I find another portal to take me back to them? "Haldir, my husband, is so good with her, he sits in her nursery for hours and lets her crawl all over him like a little ant."

"She sounds adorable."

"She really is," I agree with a pitiful laugh, brushing some of my thick hair behind my ear," I was holding her last night and she looked straight at me and said she wanted a baby brother. Well, it came out as 'want bubbly like Sam', but I'm fluent in toddler at this point."

"Uh-huh," FÃ-li nods, patting my shoulder," it takes a while to grasp the subtle nuances of the language, but I managed it when Kee was small." He looked proud about it, his chin raised and his shoulders rolled back confidently. "Something else I mastered at a young age is hair care, so allow me to fixâ€|. All of that." He gestures at my hair, now knotted from the wind and tumble through a portal, and I stand quickly. holding up my hands with my palms facing the Dwarves.

"It's fine, I'll fix it in the morning."

"Nonsense, we'll do it now since we've nothing else to occupy us." He's on his feet now and KÃ-li is joining him, those mischievous grins back in place now that their uncle isn't here to corral them. Recognizing their shared expression as one my mom had whenever she resolved to do something with my hair, I promptly turn on my heel and begin to sprint. "Get her, Kee!"

"You'll never catch me alive!"

NÃ©n herven=my husband

7. Missing Ponies and Bad Memories

ASHLEY

It took FÃ-li and KÃ-li nearly an hour to tackle me to the ground and another hour on top of that to make my hair look decent leading to a migraine on my part and several bite marks along the Dwarves' hands. "Vicious," KÃ-li laughs as he helps me up and brushes some damp leaves and dirt from my tunic. "Perhaps you'll survive our journey after all."

"I'll survive," I confirm with a wince," and I'll do it in style, too." I make my way to a nearby pond, kneeling in the damp earth at its edge to peer at my reflection, taking in the high ponytail, small braids, and little silver clasps to keep the braids from unraveling. "Well, the headache aside, it does look really nice."

"Did you expect anything less," FÃ-li remarks, standing beside me with a smile of his own. Unlike his little brother, FÃ-li had a mane of thick blonde hair, a close cut beard, and a mustache that he kept in two braids, one on either side of his mouth. "I'm a master when it comes to stubborn hair."

"Then why does KÃ-li look like he went ten rounds with a tornado and came out on the losing end?" The boys share a look, the younger looking terrified and the elder looking entirely too smug for my liking.

"I have someone to hold him down while I fix that rat's nest now." I rise and give KÃ-li a grin that matched his brother's, crossing my arms over my chest and arching a brow as I look down at him. KÃ-li came up to my chin, barely a head taller than his brother, but I still relished being the tall one for once. "We should probably head back to the ponies before Uncle finds out what we've been up to."

The walk back to the ponies was an easy one, all three of us talking over each other about our favorite weapons as we climbed sloping hills and moss-covered rocks, helping each other when the ground got slippery until it eventually leveled out again and we were standing beside Thalion. That's when things got a little tense, well, more than a little; this was possibly a DEFCON one situation.

The three of us stare in shock at the smaller amount of ponies, counting over and over with the hope that we were wrong the first time, but the number didn't change and I couldn't help a nervous gulp. _One, two, three_, I begin again, pointing at each pony as I go along, _four, fiveâ€|. Fourteen_. _I'm gonna have to dig my own grave if Grumpy finds out about this_.

I don't look away at the sound of soft footsteps, recognizing them as a Hobbit's after spending so long with Pip and Merry.

"What's the matter," Bilbo asks when no one so much as looks his way. I swallow again, fear and anxiety building up until my stomach began to ache.

"We're supposed to be lookin' after the ponies," KÃ-li starts, the nervous edge in his voice doing nothing to calm me down.

"Only we've encountered a slight problem," FÃ-li continues.

"We sort of lost track of two ponies," I finish, having to force the words out as I look on at the horses and finally lower my hand back to my side. Sensing my unease, Thalion bends his head to nudge at my shoulder, grasping the sleeve of my tunic between his teeth and pulling slightly until I have my arms around his neck in a hug. "Y'all think your uncle can laugh this one off?"

"Uncle doesn't laugh much."

"How did I know you were going to say that?"

KHARL

Kharl paces back and forth in the throne room, biting his thumbnail

as he went and tracking mud across the expensive rug that led from the doors to the throne Aragorn was slouched in. It was unnerving to see the other man so downtrodden especially since Kharl has looked up to him since they survived Moria. Aragorn was supposed to be the leader, strong and absolute in everything he did, his head held high and his gray eyes showing the world that he would do whatever it took to protect the ones he cares about.

That's why this new Aragorn set Kharl on edge; he's either been mumbling under his breath about never escaping a cursed name or staring into space. For the past three hours, Aragorn has been seated in the throne room with his crown on his head, people wandering in and out to offer congratulations on his new son and wondering why he looked so sad. It was depressing and Kharl was ready to pitch a fit right here and now no matter if people thought he'd lost what few marbles he possessed.

There was nothing they could do until Alistair and the guards returned from the forest, and that had the Fellowship in varying stages of frustration; Andi locked away in the nursery with little Sammy, the Hobbits stress eating, Gimli and Legolas practicing with their weapons outside despite the downpour, Aragorn still greeting late arrivals, and Kharl trying to keep his temper in check.

It seemed the only person unaffected by the news was Enelya, the Elleth looking perfectly pleased with herself and flitting around the Citadel as though nothing had happened. There wasn't even a hair out of place on her head, her eyes dry and still cold like nothing could touch her. She's basically a fucking ice queen and Kharl had to try hard not to knock her perfect teeth down her throat. Hell, even Thranduil offered to help Aragorn with his duties until Ash is found and that Elf practically hated her.

Those portals should come with a neon sign.

He shakes his head, deciding to leave the throne room and head to the nursery that held his niece. No matter his mood, Ariel never failed to make him happy again, to make him smile and laugh at her antics and the way she tried to talk. Most seemed to come out in gibberish or Sindarin, but every now and again he would catch a scrap of Westron. Plus, if he closed his eyes as he held her in his arms, he could almost picture his son.

Ariel's room was on the other side of the Citadel and the halls were lit by the torches held in metal sconces along the walls and the moonlight that shined in through the windows, casting flickering shadows on the marble floors that played tricks on his eyes.

When they first moved in, he would often jump and reach for his weapon when he walked the halls at night, expecting to face an Orc or Uruk-Hai, but only finding shadows. He'd thought he was losing his mind back then, finally breaking down on the way to his rooms and curling up against one of the columns with his dagger clutched tightly in both hands. That's how Andrea had found him and she'd sat on the floor next to him, talking softly of happier times until he relaxed enough for her to pry the dagger away. They'd sat like that for what seemed like hours, moments of comfortable silence interrupted by soft murmuring until the tears had dried on his face and his head was in her lap, her long and graceful fingers working the tangles out of his long hair.

It's not until Kharl reaches the familiar door to his niece's room that he realizes that he's crying again, old fears mixing with new ones and making his temples throb. How could he face his niece like this? She had her own grief to work through, so he should just go back to his chambers and stay there until he worked the anger out.

Yet it seemed his body had other ideas, legs buckling and knees hitting the floor hard enough to make them let out a Godawful crack; he stayed like that for a while, his head bent, arms hanging limply at his side, and his shoulders shaking as he thought about everything that had happened to him over the years. Memories of all the fights and battles he's been in, of all the lives he's taken since he turned nineteen, weigh heavily on his conscious and the tears come more frequently, the noises stuck in his throat and suffocating him.

He can't do this anymore; he can't be the warrior that everyone looks to during the scouting missions. He just wants it all to stop, to take a break away from all the pressures that go along with being best friends with the Queen and the brother of the Princess. Breathing became difficult and his vision began to dim, his upper body falling forward with enough force to knock open Ariel's door once he hit it. He could hear a startled cry from his niece and the unmistakable sound of someone running over to him before Haldir's face came into view.

And then Kharl was lost to blackness.

8. Hard Decisions

ANDREA

It was nearly one in the morning before the others returned, the sound of boots on marble drawing my gaze away from Kharl's still form. I bite my lip as I'm given a choice, go find out about my best friend who's fallen into another timeline or stay with my other best friend who's just had a seizure; honestly, I don't think anyone in their right minds could make that choice, let alone someone like me who doesn't have much of a mind left.

With a sigh, I shake my head and make myself comfortable on Kharl's bed, brushing some of his dark hair off his face. It was strange to see him so vulnerable and sick, the dark circles under his eyes showing his insomnia, the light sheen of sweat and fever telling me he's been outside after dark again, and the way he kept flinching and whimpering practically screamed nightmares he couldn't escape from.

No, I can't leave him when he's like this, not when he wouldn't trust anyone else to sit with him. I take up the rag the nurse had left earlier, dipping it in the basin of cool water and ringing it out before pressing it back against Kharl's forehead. God only knows how long he's been sick, but he would rather lose a toe than complain about how he feels, the stubborn prick.

"Mom," he rasps, reaching out blindly until I wrapped my hand around his, "Mama?"

"It's alright, Kharl," I murmur to him, using my free hand to smooth the hair on his head back, "you're not alone."

"Songâ€¦. Please, make them go awayâ€¦." I bite my lip again and blink back tears, clearing my throat a few times before beginning to sing a song he knew well. Hell, we all did after Ash went through her Cinderella phaseâ€"not that she ever actually got over itâ€"and the song meant safety, it meant he was with friends and people who would never abandon him.

"_A dream is a wish your heart makes when you're fast asleep; in dreams you will lose your heartaches, whatever you wish for, you keep. Have faith in your dreams and someday your rainbow will come smiling through. No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true_."

I look up again when the door to the room is opened, Aragorn sticking his head through the crack and nodding when I press a finger against my lips. Satisfied he was spreading the world to be quiet, I turn my attention back to my friend as the others file inside and make themselves comfortable.

"Unnle," Ariel says quietly, making me look her way. The baby was squirming in Haldir's lap, straining to see how her uncle was faring in his restless sleep. She reaches out a tiny hand, her fingers wiggling in Kharl's direction, but Haldir doesn't give in and just holds her closer to him. Ever since Ash disappeared, he's kept her by his side like he's afraid she'd find the next portal, which probably isn't too far off the mark considering our luck.

"It's alright, _OrÃ«_, your uncle will be fine in a few days," he murmurs, rocking back and forth until she quieted again. Kharl lets out a low moan, rubbing the side of his head against his pillow before going limp again. He's done that few times in the past few hours, like he was trying to shake off his bad dreams. "What have you found out, Alistair?"

"From what I can understand, it should take whoever goes through it to the same timeline," the physician states quietly, nervously fidgeting with the hem of his tunic. "There's another on that side that will bring the Princess back here, but you're not going to like where it is." Haldir looks up from his daughter, absently patting her bottom as he continues to move the rocking chair back and forth.

"Where is it," Aragorn asks as he sits beside me, running a hand over his face. Alistair swallows hard and struggles to maintain eye contact with my husband, his pale skin flushed from the cold and his long hair dripping water onto the thin cloth of his shirt. He didn't look happy about the news he was about to deliver and I tighten my hold on Kharl's hand on instinct.

"Where is it," Kharl asks, repeating Aragorn's question as his eyes flicker open. He tries to raise his head, but he can barely manage a few inches before he drops his head back on the pillow. "Where is the portal that'll bring my sister back?" His voice is little more than a whisper and hoarse from sleep.

"Erebor," Alistair mutters with a frown.

"That's great, someone get me a map and shove me through the portal on this end and I'll find her stubborn ass, drag her back here by her hair if I have to." I roll my eyes, resisting the urge to flick his forehead.

"There's a problem with that, sir, Erebor hasn't been claimed yet in that timeline." He clears his throat and continues to fidget. "The dragon Smaug still inhabits it and she'll have to sneak past him in order to find it and that's only if she knows what she's looking for to begin with."

"All the more reason to send someone with some sense to get her." Alistair's nervous demeanor shifts in an instant, going into doctor mode as he shoots Kharl a stern look.

"You get out of that bed before I allow it and I'll break your legâ€|. Sir."

"And I'll break the other one," I add, tugging on a lock of Kharl's hair and laughing a little when he bats my hand away. "I'll go after herâ€|"

"If anyone is going after her, it's going to be me," Haldir interrupts with a hard resolve in his pale eyes, "she's my wife and I'm the one who agreed to protect her with all I have." There's a tic in his jaw as he fights his emotions, rocking faster in the chair as he and Aragorn lock gazes. I can see right there that they've already had an argument about this and it seems that the Elf won by a hair.

"I'll take care of Ariel until you both get back." He nods in thanks, holding his daughter a little closer to his chest and pressing a kiss against the crown of her head.

"If you are going to Erebor," Gimli says from his spot against a wall, "then you'll need to find my family, they'll help you if you ask kindly enough." He pauses a moment and lets out a rumbling laugh. "Or just have the lass talk until they give in to keep her quiet, that happened with the horse lords of Rohan."

"She does have that effect on people, she annoys them into doing things for her so she'll shut up." I give Aragorn an amused look, bumping him with my shoulder until I see him give a faint smile in return. "She gets it from her adar."

9. The Amazing Bouncing Trolls

THORIN

It was moments like these that made Thorin wonder about the sanity of those surrounding him, especially that of the Dunedain woman who was cackling maniacally on his left. Most of the Company have been tied in large burlap sacks while a few of the others were tied to a spit and were hanging perilously over a roaring blaze, but Ashley was focusing her gaze intently on the three mountain trolls, watching as they bounced up and down in the air. Thorin wasn't entirely sure of the how she was levitating them, some sort of Ranger's trick no doubt, but he had to admit that the sight held amusement once one got

past the pure strangeness of it all.

"This is so much cooler than Mad-Eye Moody's trick," she confides to him, eyes following the movement of the trolls intently. She had struck the moment Bilbo drew the trolls' limited attention spans away from the roasting Dwarves, letting the little Hobbit ramble about the correct way to cook Dwarf until she seemed to remember something. Now she's been at this for nearly two minutes and Thorin could hear the muffled laughter of his nephews somewhere by his boots.

"How are you managing that," Thorin inquires, curious of how she came by such strong magic.

"Great genetics? Don't really know and don't particularly care since this comes in handy when Oliphaunts are charging at you." That was another mention of dangerous situations that she spoke of like they happened to everyone, and Thorin was left wondering if she was making such feats up or if they'd genuinely happened to her. "Watch this one, Thorin." The Dwarf turns his pale eyes back to the trolls again, letting out a faint huff of laughter as they begin to twist in the air and turn upside down. "_Now this is a story all about how my life got flipped-turned upside down_", she sings to herself with an amused gleam in her eyes.

"And here I'd thought to come rescue you all," came a familiar voice from above them, the distraction making Ashley drop the trolls back to earth, the impact making the pile of Dwarves shift and roll a few feet. Shaking the hair out of his face, Thorin can make out the form of Gandalf standing near a massive boulder across the clearing, his staff clutched in both hands as he raises it, then slams it down. The boulder cracks in half at the force of the Wizard's magic, allowing sunlight to flood inside and turn the lumbering trolls to stone. "It seems our Burglar and Ashley had everything under control."

"For once, I actually agree with you, Gandy." The Wizard makes a sound of irritation at the nickname she'd given him and Thorin found himself wondering what the old man would do if Thorin began to use it as well. It was amusing to see the Wizard so frustrated and he supposed that was one good thing that came with the Dunedain joining the Company. He wasn't fond of her, far too sarcastic for his liking, but he might grow used to her over time. While she seemed a little tired, her true exhaustion showed when she attempted to sit up and she fell back down immediately. "The word spinning for anyone else?"

Gandalf made quick work of the sack Bilbo was in and then began on the Dwarves tied to the spit as the young Hobbit helped the others, starting with those closest to him and making his way up. Thorin was one of the last to be released, standing quickly and looking around to ensure there was nothing else lurking in the trees before he met Bilbo's gaze.

"Thank you, Master Baggins," he says gruffly, never one for apologies or praise. The Hobbit gives him a friendly smile and looks down at his hairy feet for a moment before green met blue again, pink coloring Bilbo's cheeks.

"The least I could do," he replies quietly with another smile, "couldn't let all of us be killed so soon." The corner of Thorin's lips quirk up in a smirk, wondering if he had caused the flush of

pink or if it were simply caused by the excitement. A little of both, perhaps? Thorin's ego wouldn't accept anything less, but he was taken aback all the same when Bilbo rose up on the balls of his feet and plucked a leaf out of Thorin's thick hair. "Uh, sorry, I should've askedâ€" "

"Do not worry yourself, you did me a service." Bilbo tilts his head to the side as he returns to his normal stance, the curiosity in his eyes only serving to make Thorin's smirk widen into a smile. "Had you not removed the leaf, then I would have to hear my nephews' incessant teasing for the remainder of our quest."

"I don't mean to interrupt or anything," Ashley says from somewhere behind him," but I'm still in a sack over here." Bilbo let out a laugh, sending Thorin a grin over his shoulder as he passed to free the woman. Letting out a sigh, Thorin makes his way over to the Wizard to find out where he's been all this time. Had Gandalf just remained with them in the first place, this may have been avoided.

"And where have you been?" Gandalf's pleased smile diminishes at Thorin's question, turning keen blue eyes on the Dwarf as he approached.

"To look ahead," Gandalf answers with the same vagueness that made Thorin's trust in him shaky.

"And what brought you back?"

"Looking behind. It's a nasty business, but no one is missing any limbs." Thorin would give that to him, though his back would be sore for a fortnight after having a few rocks digging into it.

"No thanks to your Burglar or the woman."

"At least my Burglar had the good sense to stall for time and the woman, as you call her, tired herself to keep the trolls at bay the best she could until help arrived. Just for your safety during our journey, I would refer to her by her given name lest she puts that short sword of hers to good use." Thorin spared a brief glance behind him where the strange pair were checking each other over, making sure none of their wounds would cause any trouble. While it was true that the woman, Ashley, did have a rather sharp-looking short sword, he doubted she knew how to wield it.

"Where do you suppose they came from?" He had his attention back on the trolls, now no more than statues surrounding the dying embers in the fire pit.

"Well, you picked Bilbo up in the Shire andâ€" "

"The trolls, Gandalf, I meant the trolls." Gandalf makes a noise of realization, tapping one with the gnarled head of his staff.

"Yes, of course." He nods and mumbles something that sounded like _no head for jokes_ before continuing. "The Ettenmoors, I'm sure, though it's been ages since mountain trolls came so far south. How they got this far without being turned to stone sooner is the question that's plaguing my mind."

"They may have used a cave; you know how fond of those trolls are." A yelp made Thorin turn quickly, hand going to where his sword had rested until he was forced to lay it down in order to keep the Burglar in one piece.

"I'm okay," Ashley says quickly as all eyes turn on her, picking herself up off the ground," just a bit dizzy is all." Thorin gives her the same look he's given his nephews since they were old enough to walk, the one that says not to do anything stupid.

"No more levitating trolls for you."

And he still couldn't believe he'd actually had to say that.

10. The Troll Hoard and Jiggery Pokery

ASHLEY

It wasn't too hard to find the cave the trolls had been living out of once KÃ-li had found the imprints of heavy boots in the soft soil that made up the ground, all of us following it to the entrance of a cave that was covered by a heavy stone door, Bilbo finding the key for that with a helpful smile. Before he even voiced his finding, he watched the Dwarves struggle to force the door open and I began to realize that the Hobbit and I would get along nicely.

"Too entertaining to pass up," he tells me as we enter the yawning black hole of the cave," and it serves them right for what they did to my poor home."

"Yeah, throwing a rave in a stranger's house is on the big list of no-no's," I agree with a smile, though the smile is quickly replaced by an expression of revulsion once the stink hits us. "What the holy hell is that?" The stench was horrible, making most of us gag and cover our noses and mouths. I wince when I hear a sharp crack under my foot, remembering the same sort of noise happening inside Moria when we stumbled blindly into the mine, it's a noise that happens when boots come in contact with bones.

Hesitantly, I move my gaze to the floor and find what I really didn't want to see againâ€"bones, still covered in bits of flesh or mold, littered the floor and added to the smell of troll. Another moan escapes and I move quickly towards the center of the large cave where no bones resided, only letting out a relieved breath when my feet hit smooth dirt.

"You alright, lassie," Gloin asks, putting a hand on my arm to help steady me. Not wanting to open my mouth and chance the putrid odor making me gag again, I give the red-haired Dwarf a nod and cover my mouth and nose with part of my tunic, not that it smelled so great itself. Along the walls were clothing of previous victims, quite a few stained with blood and none of them big enough to even fit over one of the trolls' fat heads.

I move further along, taking in old weapons and even bits of armor, rusted from age and thrown carelessly into piles. I kneel next to a pile of cloth, picking up the fine silk of a dress and examining it closer until I'm able to recognize it; it's fine and high quality with small roses stitched into the sleeves along the elbows, the

vibrant red standing out against the black of the material. This is Elvish made, similar to the gown Enelya wore on the day I met her, and that means either dead Elves or humans that were trading with them. I drop it quickly and move away from it, only interested in getting back outside.

I get a few looks as I barrel past everyone, but all of them just go back to whatever held their attention. The fresh air outside was more than welcome and I take several deep breaths after finding a suitable place to sit down, shaded by the slight overhang of rock with my back against the rough wall outside the cave. I lean my head back and close my eyes, willing my heart to slow down and nausea to go away.

"What would Adar do," I whisper to myself, "how would he calm himself? Probably by picturing his family, but that'll only make me more upset right now. Ugh, that stench is never gonna leave, I just know it." I scrunch up my nose and shudder in disgust, willing the smell to stay in the cave and not waft outwards. "Okay, think of autumns in Minas Tirith; long walks in the gardens, leaves changing colors, flower crowns. Yeah, that's better." Soon my heartbeat is back to normal and my stomach doesn't feel like it's doing summersaults, the quiet mumbling of the Company taking me back to the nights I would listen to the Fellowship before we broke apart.

I was almost asleep when I felt something cold nudging my cheek, my eyes opening and then crossing in order to look at the dark brown thing inches from my face. It took me longer than I'm proud of to realize that brown thing is Thalion's nose and that the stallion had followed us here after the sounds of fighting had died down.

Smart boy.

Smiling softly, I reach out a hand to run it along his leg, the coarse hairs making my fingers itch. Thalion lets out a soft snort and moves back a little, the front of my tunic in his teeth as he makes me stand up.

"Bossy today, aren't you," I ask with a laugh, wrapping my arms around his neck loosely and hugging him. "We've been through everything together pretty much, but you were smart enough to stay away from those nasty trolls, boy." If they had eaten my horse, I would've dropped them on their heads.

The others start coming out soon after Thalion arrived, each carrying some food and talking about everything they'd found while Dwalin and Balin heft out a large barrel of ale; Bilbo and Bombur take control of making breakfast while Gandalf and Thorin look over a pair of swords they'd found, and the others look over the small chests of gold and pouches of coin. I had no need of money considering I've got it made and I wasn't hungry after nearly being squished by trolls, so I settle for lying down close to Thalion and trying to sleep.

HALDIR

After being forced to rest until late afternoon by Alistair, Haldir was more than ready to shoulder his pack and head through the portal, but no one seemed especially ready for that to happen; Ariel clung to him tightly and continued to whimper, Kharl kept suggesting that he

take Haldir's place, and Ellesar was still fighting the deep sadness that he had the first time he'd sent his daughter through a portal. The only one of the group with even a bit of a clear head was Legolas and even he had his doubts about it all.

"I'll back soon, _nÃ©n orÃ©_, and I'll have your _naneth_ with me when I do," he murmurs to the baby in his arms, resting his cheek against her soft curls. He would miss her the most while he's gone, the little girl that stole his heart and held it in her hands; he was so used to falling asleep with her familiar weight on his chest that he didn't know how he would sleep without it. "Be good for Andrea, alright?"

"Adar," she whimpers, little hands fisted in the material of his shirt, "mine."

"Always and forever, little heart, but I must go for a little while. I promise I will come back, I promise you, my sweet girl." Even knowing he had to go on a dangerous mission to rescue his wife, Haldir found it nearly impossible to let the Queen take his child, having to fight back tears of his own when he no longer has her safely in his arms.

"You know she'll be safe here," Ellesar says reassuringly, resting a hand on the Elf's shoulder. Haldir nods and swallows past the lump building in his throat, pale eyes turning to the swirling portal in the middle of the forest on the outskirts of Minas Tirith. It was a miracle that no one had stumble through it beforeâ€"Alistair would have sensed something like thatâ€"and here he was about to jump through it voluntarily. "Here's Larien's pack, it has her favorite book in it as well because we all know how crabby she can be when bored."

"All too well." Haldir nods again with a faint smile, remembering the calm days after Minas Tirith was rebuilt and she had nothing to keep her occupied for long periods of time. In fact, he's quite sure it was around then that Ariel was conceived, though Andrea and Aragorn seemed to have more restraint. "I'll ensure she gets this and I'll bring her back."

"You'd better," Kharl calls out from his spot between Faramir and Legolas, his arms around their necks in order to stay upright. He still looked horrible, skin pale and cheeks flushed from the fever he couldn't shake off, and his dark green eyes were bright with worry that only made him feel worse. They'd only dressed him fifteen minutes ago and his tunic was already stuck to his body because of sweat. "Else I'm comin' in after ya, and you won't like it one little bit, Elfy."

"I'll keep that in mind," Haldir responds with a smile, taking Ashley's pack from her adar. "Now, where exactly will this portal have me end up?"

"Alistair used a bit of jiggery pokery," Andrea says, her fingers intertwined with her husband's, "and he says it'll let you out somewhere near Rivendell. The Company passed through there at some point and we're using the hope and guess method that you'll be able to intercept them."

"Jiggery pokery?"

"Would you rather I used mumbo jumbo or hocus pocus? 'Cause I have several of those terms memorized." He can't help his laugh, suddenly glad that Andrea had the ability to make people happy despite the horrible circumstances. Maybe that's where his wife picked it up? "Alright, Haldir, go pick up our idiot and bring her back so I can slap her until she's black and blue."

"As you command." He gives a dramatic bow, laughing again when the blonde gives a light kick to his ankle with a smile of her own. "Hopefully I can find her and get her back before this evening so she can attend her little brother's celebration." He meets Aragorn's anxious gaze, the smile disappearing as he gives another curt nod of understanding. Just get back in one piece. He takes a deep breath and faces the portal, gathering his courage before taking the last few steps forward.

And then he was lost in a dizzying spiral of darkness.

****NÃ©n orÃ©=my heart****

****Naneth=Mother****

11. Agent Elrond's Shenanigans

ASHLEY

You never know how much you miss cars until you're forced to run in order to survive with no hope of a break in sight. After Radagast the Brown had intercepted us a few minutes ago, the snarls of Wargs could be heard and we've been running and hiding ever since, and my lungs might not be able to take it for much longer. Trolls wanting to roast us like chestnuts over an open fire had been bad enough, but now we've got Orcs on our trail and I had hoped never to see one of those again. "I'm gonna be ten pounds lighter before we're able to stop running," I gasp, following the group behind one of the large stone formations that broke up the plain.

"Quickly," Gandalf instructs once the Wargs and Orcs pass us by, gesturing for us to sprint to the next formation. My lungs already burning, I start sprinting again with Thalion's reigns wrapped around my hand, the poor horse just following as silently as he could to avoid the monsters coming after us. As we made our way towards another large outcropping, Ori grabs the back of my tunic and yanks me to the side, Radagast guiding his rabbits and the monsters past us several yards away.

"I didn't realize how out of shape I've gotten lately." I rest my hands on my knees and lean forward to catch my breath as we come to another stop, trying desperately to keep my panting quiet like the others. I haven't run this much since I woke up in Rivendell two years ago and I really didn't want to join up with another gang of adrenaline-addicted wackos, but here I am. Andi's going to murder me if I make it back. The sound of vicious snarling from behind me makes me tense and straighten up slowly, looking towards Thorin as he nods at Kee.

In a few graceful movements the Dwarf backs away from our rock and fires off an arrow, the yelp that followed letting all of us know

he'd hit the Warg. Soon after that, the Warg and its rider tumble to the ground, the Orc very much alive and the Warg shrieking in its harsh language; Dwalin and Bifur take care of the Orc before it had a chance to harm any of us, but the noise would draw the others our way anytime now.

"Move," Gandalf shouts as the howling and cursing grow louder, "run!" A sob escapes as I start up running again, urging Thalion to keep moving even though the horse looked braver than I do at this point. "This way!" I look away from the Orcs that were closing ranks, never faltering except when we were forced to change directions. This would be easier if this place had more rocks or thicker trees, but it's basically wide open. It's not long until we have enemies on all sides and closing in, the Orcs snarling in the guttural tones of Black Speech and gnashing their teeth. Knowing Thalion would have a better chance than any of us, I drop his reigns and urge him to run before drawing Linte out of its scabbard, the Elvish blade glowing blue.

"If I survive this," I say to Bilbo as I nudge him behind me, "then I'm never going to join a gang again." The first time was understandable, but this is the second time I've been roped into a situation like this and it's getting more than a little ridiculous. "My family is going to kick my ass in the afterlife." Using my telekinesis, I force a Warg backwards and an Orc sailing through the air before it's blade could reach Bilbo.

"Where's Gandalf gone to," the Hobbit demands breathlessly, sticking close to me as I force another Orc away from me. "He hasn't left us, has he?"

"Wouldn't be the first time."

"This way, you fools," Gandalf shouts a moment later, his head and shoulders visible above one of the rocks. I urge Bilbo to go first, covering him until we make it to where Gandalf had appeared, not hesitating to slide down into the ravine between formations to join the Wizard and others.

"Magic," I whisper to myself as I move farther from the others, sheathing the short sword and reaching out a hand, watching as the fine hairs on my arm stand on end. This was different than the magic of a portal, this was warm and gentle, almost alive. A horn sounds from above us, familiar as any I've heard and I let out a relieved breath. "I know that horn." I push my way past the Dwarves only to have Thorin grab my wrist and yank me backwards away from the entrance, pressing a finger to his lips. "But I know that horn."

"It's not safe," he hisses, the authority in his voice making me step down automatically since it was the same tone my father used whenever something was important. Magic and the horn mean we're close to Elf territory and I have an idea of just which house that's going to be. Agent Smith, here I come, I hope you still have plenty of pickles. A dead Orc tumbles down suddenly, an arrow embedded in his neck. "Elves," Thorin informs the others once he had the arrow in hand, throwing it down as though it had bit him.

"I know this path, Gandalf." I face the Wizard, still breathing hard and more than anxious to get to civilization. "Are we really going

there?"

"It seems we have little choice in the matter." I ignore the pissed off Dwarf, keeping my gaze locked with Gandy's until he dips his head. "Will he be there?" Gandalf knew who I was referring to, his blue eyes showing pity as he nods again, resting a wrinkled hand on my shoulder.

"He's only a boy in this timeline," he says quietly, "and he is not alone." I stiffen, thinking of Arwen at first and then realizing who Gandalf meant. Gilraen, she'd still be with Aragorn in Rivendell, she'd still be alive. Adar didn't talk about her much because he still grieved for her and now I would get an opportunity to see more than my grandmother's grave. "You will be fine, Ashley; it's a large place and you may not even run into them."

"I'd agree with you if I didn't have such rotten luck." Sighing, I turn and follow the others along the zig-zagging ravine, looking over my shoulder every now and then to see if anyone was following behind us. I might see my family soon, but they wouldn't recognize me and that's going to hurt worse than anything a battle could do to me. We follow the well-trod path without stopping, Bilbo and Ori both looking around in slight astonishment at the green grass underfoot and the high, smooth walls of the ravine, but Haldir's brought me this way before. Back then I was still in recovery and the stitches running along my right side were itchy as sin, but all the aches and pains faded away when Haldir smiled my way—a cheeky smile that never failed to turn my legs to jelly—and asked if I'd marry him before we went on any more adventures. I'd said yes of course, but it was several months before we actually tied the knot, the reconstruction of Gondor coming first.

As the sun was beginning its descent, we come out on a narrow stone bridge that spanned over a bubbling river several stories below us, the stone just wide enough for a single-file line. There was nothing to hang onto as we cross, so I kept on hand on the Hobbit's shoulder and the other slightly out to keep me balanced until we reached the wide circle of stone on the other side.

"Imladris," Gandy announces once all of us passed the two statues on either side of this end of the bridge, looking quite pleased with himself, "or Rivendell as most know it."

"Brightest place on earth," I quip with a frown, wishing now more than ever that I had Andrea's sunglasses with me. This place is way too bright in the mornings and no Elf I've met so far has ever had the decency to let me hate my mornings; always talking, wide awake, and singing. Who the fuck in their right mind wakes up and decides to sing? "And I'd so hoped never to come back here. The damn Elves sing way too much and way too early, and I'm not a nice person in the mornings."

"You and Uncle have that in common," Fā-li remarks and grins when Thorin turns icy eyes on him. "You always told me to be honest." Thorin mutters something in Khuzdul and I can tell from his expression of ire that it's probably a swear word.

"This will take no small amount of charm," Gandalf starts again, sending our group a stern look, "so I suggest you all let me do the talking." Jeez, it's just like when we first met Denethor when he

told Pip and I to keep our mouths shut_. At least some things never change and you can always count on Gandy to be a smooth talker. I'm not going to complain though, whatever gets me out of being social is good by me. The Dwarves look around suspiciously while Bilbo has an awestruck expression as he takes in the graceful arches of the waterfalls spilling down into the river below us; I just want to get inside where the food is, but Elves are all about pomp and circumstance. It's not until the doors open and a familiar dark-haired Elf descends the steps towards us that I zone back in, pushing thoughts of steak and honey cakes to the back of my mind.

"Mithrandir," the Elf greets with one hand over his heart and a smile making his lips curve upward.

"Lindir," Gandy returns with a pleased smile of his own, turning to face him and giving him the same gesture. Lindir's a nice guy for the most part—he'd been the one to stitch up my side—and he was always up for a quiet game of hopscotch down at the river.

"_Lastannem i athrannedh i Vruinen_."

"I must speak with Lord Elrond."

"My lord Elrond is not here." Of course he's not, that would be way too easy for all of us. I swear, I must've pissed Lady Luck off somehow and now she's out for blood.

"Then where might we find him?" That question is answered directly afterwards by the horn from earlier, Elves in armor riding towards us at a rapid pace, their horses' hooves loud and echoing on the stone as I'm yanked and pushed to the center of the Company with Bilbo, the Elves surrounding us. I roll my eyes at the dramatics, eyes locked on who I know to be the leader.

"Gandalf," Elrond calls out with a friendly smile that Gandy returns, the Wizard moving to hold onto the stallion's reigns so Elrond can dismount.

"_Mellonnen! Mo evÃ-nedh?_"

"_Farannem 'lamhoth i udul o charad. Dagannem rim na Iant Vedui._" Despite his disgruntled tone, the head honcho still offers up a smile and embraces Gandalf like an old friend. Seeing that made me glad that he doesn't know me yet considering the jackass insists on hugging me every time we meet just because it irks me; on the other hand, a hug would be really nice right about now. Not ten seconds after than thought passed through my mind, I turn to look at the other riders and find one standing just outside the circle of the Company, his silver-gold hair standing out against his colleagues' and his pale blue eyes are focused on me. A choked sound escapes as I take in the familiar features, itching to reach out and touch him just once. I quickly move past the Dwarves and stop barley a foot away from him, tears welling in my eyes.

"_Mel_," he breathes in relief, pulling me against his hard chest and letting me wrap my arms around his waist with a cry. "I had thought I'd lost you when I found Thalion without his rider." I hold him tighter, cheek pressed against his chest as my shoulders started to

heave from my crying. "Come, _nÃ©n mÃ-rÃ«_, Lord Elrond has been gracious enough to have a room prepared." He picks me up in his arms and makes his way into Elrond's home, navigating the halls easily and only setting me down only when he needed to open our door. He makes sure I'm steady before pushing the door open and leading the way inside, our hands joined. _If I don't lose contact with him, then he won't disappear; this won't be a dream_. Haldir kicks the door shut with the sole of his boot, pulling me close again and kissing me deeply, like he couldn't get enough. It's only when the urge to breathe is too much to ignore that we pull apart, breath mingling in the space between our lips.

Still not entirely sure of everything, I wrap one around his neck to play with the soft strands of hair gathered there in a braid while my free hand came up to cup his cheek. "Am I asleep," I ask, voice barely more than a whisper as I meet his gaze. There's dark purple shadows under his eyes, the whites of them are shot through with red like he's been reading without any light again, and he looks ready to break.

"This is real, Larien, I promise you." He bends down for another kiss and then jerks backwards with a sharp hiss, rubbing his cheek where I'd pinched it. "Listen here, if anyone should be pinching, then it should be me doing it to you for disappearing on me."

"I'm sorry, I just wanted to make sure."

"You're meant to pinch yourself, dearest." He looks disgruntled now and I can't help but laugh at his pout, moving back over to him and resting my hands on his broad shoulders. "Come to kiss it and make it feel better, then?" He bends so that his lips brush mine whenever he speaks, voice taking on that husky quality that never fails to send my heart beating ninety miles a minute. "Or perhaps we could do something much more interesting?" I open my mouth to agree, or at least make a squeak of agreement, but another noise all together happens. My stomach rumbles loud enough to bring a Targaryen back from the dead and get him ready for battle.

Haldir raises his eyebrows with a half-smile playing on his lips as we both stare down at my stomach. Just my luck, I'm about to get laid and all my stomach wants is steak. _Mm, or pickles, or that really great pasta I had the last time I was hereâ€|. _

Fuck, I'm starving.

* * *

><p>After a quick bath, Haldir and I join the others outside where the tables had been set up; all of the Company apart from Thorin and Gandy were seated at a low, long table while the others were seated at a higher, round one. "Ah, Larien," Elrond greets when he spots us," please, we saved you both a seat." I go straight for the table, dragging Haldir after me and not paying attention to much of anything until I had a spoonful of mashed taters in my mouth.<p>

"Classy, aren't you," Thorin remarks, raising a brow when I meet his stare and take a huge bite out of a roll. At this point, I couldn't care less about social etiquette and no stupid looks from the others is going to change that. They want civil, then they can wait until tomorrow afternoon. "Would you care to introduce me?" I roll my eyes

and set my spoon down, swallowing my food and then gesturing at my husband.

"Thorin, this is Haldir; Haldir, this is that asshole Dwarf I told you about while I was getting dressed." I look at the Dwarf again and give a slight raise of my brows to see if he was happy with the information or not. "He's my husband and it seems he drew the short straw and had to jump through a portal to come rescue me."

"You're a brave Elf for marrying her."

"Well, she did save my life during a battle," Haldir shrugs, resting an arm on the back of my chair as I continue to stuff my face," and look how beautiful she is." I pause, my mouth entirely full and my cheeks bulging out, which makes Haldir let out a snort of laughter. "On days she isn't starving, she's quite good company." It's Thorin's turn to snort this time, though his was one of disbelief that earned him an elbow to the ribs.

"If you weren't a womanâ€¦" He lets the threat hang in the air, but I just grin in return, turning my gaze to the complaining Dwarves behind us. There was no sign of meat on their plates, just vegetables and some eggs, and I had to hold in a snicker at their disgruntled expressions as they dig through their salads in the hope of finding meat.

"Are you fucking with them on purpose," I ask, gesturing at them as I look back to Elrond," 'cause I know for a fact that you guys eat meat." The contents of my plate were proof enough for that; steak, a small bit of what tastes like Elk, some mashed potatoes, and corn.

"It's one of my few pleasures," Elrond smiles with a wink. "I'm sure they'll raid my pantry later and find the meat."

"You gonna short-sheet their beds, too?"

"Come now, even I am not that cruel, Larien." This younger Elrond is a lot cooler than the guy from my timeline. _God, I'm gonna start liking him and when I get back it's gonna be weird_. Then again, maybe I can talk the Elrond from my time into a prank war against Andi and my dad. "Perhaps you could answer a question I had that Gandalf didn't. What exactly were all of you doing on the Great East Road?" Thorin delivers a kick to my ankle and I let out a muffled whimper.

"Ah, you know, important Dwarf stuffâ€¦. Things." Thorin sends me a warning look before excusing himself from our table, taking the sword he found in the troll hoard and walking away.

"Thirteen Dwarves, a Halfling, and a missing Princess; strange traveling companions for you, Gandalf." If he only knew about the Fellowship, then this wouldn't be so strange. I tune the new conversation out, focusing back on the plateful of food in front of me. It's been three days since I last had something that didn't previously belong to a troll named Bert, William, or Tom and this corn is practically the definition of Heaven. I'm jerked out of thoughts of what dessert might be when Bofur's deep voice rings out.

"_There's an inn, there's an inn, there's a merry old inn beneath an old gray hill_, " he sings with a shit-eating grin, the others banging their silverware to match his rhythmic stomping on the table," _and there they brew a beer so brown the man in the moon himself came down one night to drink his fill!_" The others join in and food begins to fly soon after, a roll soaring towards my table and I catch it easily before it can smack Elrond in the face.

"Before I get hit by an egg," I state, standing up with my plate and goblet of wine in hand," I'm heading back to my room." Haldir stands even quicker, almost making his chair tip over as he does so.
"Alright, slick, you'll get what you want, but I'm finishing my damn food first."

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**Linte = Swift  
>Lastannem i athrannedh i Vruinen. = We heard you had crossed into  
the valley.<br>Mellonnen! Mo evÃ-nedh? = My friend! Where have you  
been?  
>Farannem 'lamhoth i udul o charad. Dagannem rim na Iant Vedui. =  
We've been hunting a pack of Orcs that came up from the South. We  
slew a number near the Hidden Pass.<br>Mel = Love  
>NÃ@n mÃ-rÃ« = my jewel<strong>
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12. Gilraen's Hope

THORIN

Three days later and Thorin still couldn't remember the quickest routes in Elrond's home; pitiful, really, but it was the truth and he hated this place. "I understand what you mean about the halls being confusing," he grumbles as he and Ashley make yet another turn down the stretching corridors of Imladris. It's only when he doesn't get a reply that he pauses and looks over his shoulder, finding the Dunedain woman a few steps behind him and looking out one of the large windows. Had she not looked so miserable he would've just left her, but he did have a heartâ€"despite rumors otherwiseâ€"and he moved to stand next to her.

Below them was an older woman and a small boy in the gardens, the woman seated on a bench and the boy making wild gestures as he told her a story. Thorin couldn't tell much from so high above them, but he could make out the woman's fair hair and the boy's darker hue.

"I know them," Ashley says after a second, drawing Thorin's gaze back to her. Her brown eyes were glistening with unshed tears and her breaths were coming a bit quicker as she continues to watch the pair," That's Gilraen and Estel, her son." She swallows hard and blinks the tears away, but one manages to escape and makes a trail across a pallid cheek. "My father and grandmother."

Thorin easily understood the pain she felt, of wanting to embrace her grandmother, but being unable to do so. He would give anything to hear his mother call out his name, have his father clap him on the back, or suffer through one of his brother's pranks. Knowing Ashley didn't like grand shows of affection (he didn't either, so their tumultuous friendship may just work out), he rests a hand on her shoulder and gives it a comforting squeeze.

"Come, supper should be ready soon and we still need to get through

this maze."

"Damn Elves, they always make everything difficult." The words were only half-sarcastic and Thorin found himself agreeing wholeheartedly.

"Damn Elves, indeed." They were quiet for the rest of the trip down to where the tables were set up out on a balcony, meat now served to the Dwarves as Elrond had grown bored with his tricks after he woke the second day to find his pantry close to emptied. As per the usual, Thorin and Ashley joined the Elves and Gandalf at the rounded table, Thorin only half-listening to the others as he kept an eye on his kinsmen. They were a rowdy bunch and he didn't need to hear the Elves complain again about being hit by a pie that Fā-li had meant for Kā-li.

Behind him, he could make out a quiet conversation his nephews were having—some sort of retaliation against Elrond in the form of pouring honey on the Elf's pillowcase—and he had to say that it was far more interesting than the conversation happening at his table. Elrond was talking again about the dangers of their quest, followed by Gandalf quickly changing the subject, a quipped remark from Ashley, and a quiet murmur from her husband to calm her temper. Honestly, it was as interesting as watching paint dry and he'd rather throw himself off the ledge of the balcony than participate.

"—|. And then the whole thing went up in flames," Haldir was saying as Thorin tuned back in to the conversation at hand," her brother was sore for months and he still doesn't trust our cook not to try that again." Ashley was nodding along, her head propped up by her hand as she stared down at her plate. She looked as bored as Thorin felt and he considered striking up a conversation that might interest her, but she opened her mouth before he could.

"Excuse me," she mumbles distractedly, "I'm not hungry tonight." She pushes away from the table before anyone could say anything, almost fleeing back inside with the skirt of her pale green dress trailing on the floor.

"She'll be fine in a moment; she just doesn't like being around so many people for so long."

"How does she manage in her timeline, then," Thorin inquires, turning his gaze to the Elf on his right," given that she'll be ruling a kingdom after her father passes."

"She's learning how to deal with people for longer periods of time, but she still needs to escape outside from time to time." Haldir didn't seem too concerned and Thorin realized that this was nothing unusual, probably even natural since she had Elvish blood in her and he knew how much Elves loved nature. "She'll be her normal self in an hour or so." _That's scary enough to think about_. Thorin doesn't comment on that, using his knife to push the salad greens around on his plate. He'd finished his stake earlier and even managed a few vegetables, but salad was something he didn't have a taste for.

Instead he found himself contemplating the strangest companion in the Company, the little Hobbit who'd run away from his cozy hobbit-hole to come on an adventure. Was it the Took in him like the Wizard had

said or something deeper than that? Perhaps Bilbo had felt compassion towards the Dwarves, a need to help them however he could? The Hobbit is a complete mystery to him in most ways; why would anyone go on such a dangerous quest for someone they'd only known a few short hours?

It made no sense to Thorin, but he was unable to turn Bilbo away after all he's already been through. A lesser person would have kicked them all out of his home, but Bilbo had simply watched as thirteen Dwarves ransacked his lovely home. Pale blue eyes search for the Hobbit among the others, finding his curly mop of dark blonde hair and smiling a little. He was attractive for someone so small, hazel eyes widened in awe of everything, leaf-shaped ears that barely showed beneath a wild mane of hair, bare feet with curly hair on top. No beard in sight, though Thorin found himself interested by the smooth and rosy cheeks that puffed out whenever Bilbo took too large a bite.

More and more often, Thorin was searching out the Hobbit among the crowd of Dwarves, taking in the innocence that radiated off him in waves and the way he struggled to help wherever he could. He's a curious little thing, learning whatever he could worm out of people and even repeating a few words of Khuzdul that he'd managed to catch from time to time. He struggled with the pronunciation, but it sent a shock through Thorin whenever it was attempted.

Perhaps Bilbo Baggins would grow on him in the end.

* * *

><p>After supper was over, Thorin decided on a walk through the gardens, the sweet scents and cool air calming his frayed nerves. There was something about Imladris that both soothed him and kept him on edge, the haughty attitudes of some of the Elves eating at him until he just needed time by himself. He was just planning a short stroll before turning back to the Company, but then he heard a familiar voice carried by the faint breeze.<p>

He'd never heard her sing before and so was curious, following the sound until he was half-hidden behind one of the rose bushes. Ashley sat on the same bench her grandmother had occupied earlier that evening, her gaze on the dark-haired boy seated at her feet, his head resting against her legs and her finger working gently through his tangled locks.

"_People always say life is full of choices_, " she was singing quietly, almost like a lullaby for the little boy, " _no one ever mentions fear, or how the world can seem so vast on a journey to the past. Somewhere down this road, I know someone's waiting; years of dreams just can't be wrong. Arms will open wide, I'll be safe and wanted, finally home where I belong_. " She trails off and smiles sadly at the child, his breathing deep and his mouth slightly open in sleep.

"This is your father, then," Thorin inquires softly as he reveals himself, " the future King that you fought beside?" She nods, still working her fingers through his hair. He's a small boy for being ten, though Thorin can see some resemblances to Ashley around the mouth and eyes.

"Yeah, this is him, but he doesn't even know his real lineage yet." She gives Thorin a half-smile and a huff of laughter, shaking her head. "I've always had to tilt my head up in order to look him in the eyes and now I'm the tall one."

"That must seem strange to you." She nods and pats the empty space beside her, Thorin taking the hint and sitting down. "Though, it can't be as strange as being sent so far into the past."

"Eighty years in the past, my father's ninety in my timeline."

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty-five." Thorin's thick brows furrow as he considers that, looking down at the child and then at the young woman beside him.

"You're just a little girl, you shouldn't have been in any battles yet." Even Ori is older than Ashley, so how'd she get to fight in battles at only twenty-three years of age? And even now, she must find the portal in Erebor to get back to her home, but that would involve helping to kill a dragon.

"I age differently than Dwarves, remember? I won't live to be two hundred, so they consider me an adult right now." It still amazed Thorin that humans rush into battle so young sometimes, like they were throwing away their lives before they had a chance to live them. _For Mahal's sake, even Bilbo is fifty!_ How could he let this child fight beside him now? "Are you having a crisis? 'Cause you look like you're having a mental crisis right now."

"Iâ€¦." He trails off, staring at the woman in slight shock. "I just find it difficult to think of someone so young having seen so much war already." Ashley lowers her dark eyes to her feet, bare and standing out sharply against the dark grass. He knew the expression she wore now, it was the same one he had whenever he remembered the sound of clashing swords and the rage of battle, the one he had whenever he woke from nightmares of his grandfather's head being thrown his way.

"You never get used to the bloodshed," she murmurs after a moment of silence between them, broken only by the little King's soft breaths. "My husband was almost killed during one of the battles, my best friend nearly died during the larger one, and Iâ€¦." She rubs at her right side with a wince and swallows hard before speaking again. "Sorry, phantom pains come and go still."

"What happened?"

"I was thrown by a Fell-beast during the Boss Fight and my brother accidentally cut me while trying to remove my chainmail." She raises a hand and points to the scar above her left eye, drawing his gaze there. "This one is from an Orc blade just before these guys from Rohan and rescued me."

"You've certainly had an adventurous life thus far."

"That's one way of putting it." She was smiling again and it seemed to be contagious, Thorin smiling as well even as another woman came across them. She was tall and moved gracefully with long, fair hair

that hung freely down her back. She's not an Elven, though she dressed in their style of clothing, and Thorin figured she was the boy King's mother.

"Thank you for watching him," the woman says to Ashley, giving a nod of thanks that the other woman returns.

"It was no problem, he's a really great kid." Despite the smile Ashley kept in place, Thorin could see a deep sadness in her eyes as the woman comes closer and kneels next to the child. "He fell asleep a few minutes ago after making me sing to him."

"Yes, he loves to hear singing." The fair-haired woman reaches out a hand and places it on the one Ashley had on the boy's head, giving it a squeeze. "Perhaps you could join us for lunch tomorrow?" Ashley looked completely lost, torn between accepting to offer to learn more about her family and turning her down to avoid the pain. Feeling sympathy for the poor girl, Thorin interjects to save Ashley the choice.

"My apologies, my lady," he says quickly, "but we will be leaving soon and she needs to rest for the long journey ahead." The woman's blue eyes meet Thorin's for a moment, the same strong will reflected there that he saw every time Ashley challenged him. "I am Thorin Oakenshield, at your service." As expected, he bows as well as he can while sitting and watches as she stands to curtsy.

"I am Gilraen and this is Estel, at your service, my lord." With a last look at Ashley, Gilraen wakes her son and leads him away, leaving Ashley and Thorin by themselves in the gardens.

"She knows who you are." Ashley makes a face at that and shakes her head. "You see how she watched you? She looked at you like she wanted nothing more than to hold you close and she is not stupid."

"I can't!" She stops and presses her lips together firmly, shaking her head again. "I can't get close to her or things might not turn out like they're supposed to in the future." But she wants to know her grandmother, he can see it in the way she stared at the woman in awe. "I should go to my room; I'm sure Hal is growing worried."

"Goodnight, Ashley." She makes it all the way to the bush he'd hidden behind earlier before turning back to face him, biting her lip and looking like she was debating something before heaving a sigh.

"Have you ever thought of who you want to spend the rest of your life with?" Taken aback, Thorin can only give a slight shake of his head. "Maybe you should start since you'll have your kingdom back soon. I can be your wingman if you want; you know, put in a good word to Bilbo for you." _How would she possibly know about his interest with the Halfling?_ What if everyone knew about it and were laughing about it behind his back?

What the hell is a wingman?

13. Goonies Never Say Die

ASHLEY

It was late afternoon when all of us left the safety of Rivendell, packs on our backs and bellies full. I wasn't looking forward to all the walking ahead of usâ€”too damn lazy to ever enjoy it except for in short burstsâ€”but it would be nice to reach Erebor and do a cannonball through the damn portal. Just imagining the horrified expression on Enelya's face at the thought of me hanging out with Dwarves is enough to keep me going. Haldir and I stay towards the back of the group, my husband not even huffing as we follow a path on the side of a mountain. It's great having him here, someone I can trust without a doubt and a cuddle partner on the cold nights. He knows what I've been through and I know most of his past, and we work great together; who better to take on a dangerous adventure than the man you want to spend the rest of your life with?

"This would be so much easier," I gasp several hours later, "if we had the Indiana Jones theme playing in the background." The only response I get is a rumble of thunder from overhead, lightening flashing, and the dark clouds covering any shred of moonlight there might have been. The rain started up a few minutes ago, making the rock under our feet slick and treacherous. _This must be what the Goonies felt like when they went across that log_.

"Steady," Thorin calls from the front of the line, "keep hold of something!" Not even pausing to think, I reach my hand back and catch hold of Haldir's shirt. A few Dwarves ahead of me, Bilbo nearly tumbles into the chasm, the rock crumbling under his feet seconds before Bofur and Dwalin caught the back of his coat; my breath catches in my throat, watching in shock as they haul him back against the side of the mountain.

"He's alright," Haldir assures me, lips close to my ear so I can hear him over the rain, "they have him, _Mel_."

"We need to take shelter! Be on the lookout for anything we could use!"

"Look out," Dwalin shouts right after, Haldir spotting the trouble before I do and wrapping himself around me. There's a loud _boom_ after that, followed by rocks raining down on us.

"What is it," I ask, afraid to raise my head to find out as the rocks continued to fall. "Another avalanche? I swear, if Saruman caused this one too, then I'll strangle him with his own damn beard!"

"No, Larien, it's Stone Giants." _Fucking really, we have Stone Giants now?_ Wargs I can understand, Orcs I'm a little iffy about, but Stone Giants? What kind of World of Warcraft shit is that? "Stay close to me and watch where you put your feet." _The Goonies never had to face something like this_. The rock shifts beneath us and Haldir lets out a scream as it crumbles away, the tight grip I have on his shirt and my telekinesis the only things keeping him from plummeting to his death.

"No," I shriek, the mountain completely shifting as a Giant forms out of the stone we're on, "hang on!" With some help from a few of the others, I get my husband back on solid ground, shoving him hard against the stone with my hands fisted in the cotton of his shirt. "Are you okay?!" If he wasn't okay, then I don't know what I would do.

"I've certainly been better." The color has vanished from his cheeks and he was staring around us wildly, one strong arm firmly around my waist to keep me close to him. "Let's never climb another mountain once this is over."

"No arguments here, mountains are bad luck!" The leg we're on continues to pivot in sharp, jerky movements, making it even harder to keep one the damn thing. Just when I was thinking things couldn't get any worse, the leg of the other Giant changes course and starts coming our way, jutting stone crashing against our precipice. Instinct takes over and I focus on the stone behind me, pressing with my mind until it gives way and all of us fall backwards into safety. The knee hits where all of us had just been before the other Giant falls backwards, leaving our part of the group breathing hard and trying not to shit ourselves. I rest my head on Haldir's shoulder, willing my heartbeat to return to normal now that that particular danger has passed.

"Where's Bilbo," Bofur calls out in a panic, "where's the Hobbit?!" _We really can't seem to catch a break tonight_. Tired and aching, I sit back up and crawl to the edge to peer down, spotting the Hobbit a few feet away on my left, clinging to the rock by his fingertips.

"Down there," I call to the Dwarves, pointing at the little Hobbit, but unable to help until my surroundings stop spinning. "He'sâ€" I'm cut off as Haldir pulls me backwards, noticing the way I was swaying dangerously. I watch as Thorin rescues Bilbo and then climbs back up with the help of his cousin, shooting a snotty look at the Hobbit. "He's just angry because he wants Billy Boy to make the first move."

"I thought we'd lost our Burglar for a moment there," Dwalin admits breathlessly and Thorin's eyes narrow with his anger.

"He's been lost since he left his home," he adds harshly, not meeting my gaze and turning to face the front again, "He should never have come. He has no place amongst us." Haldir and I share agitated looks, having dealt with Gimli and Leggy when they were in denial, too. Two years later and they refuse to get married but they _have_ adopted a cute little baby that was orphaned during the War of the Ring; a human from Rohan with chubby little cheeks and a bright smile.

"I'mma whoop his ass in a second," I grumble as Hal helps me to my feet, an arm about my waist to keep me from collapsing.

"You can't even stand by yourself yet," he points out, always the logical one of the two of us. "At least wait until you've regained some of your strength." There's a cave a few feet down, though it takes us quite a bit to get inside given the slippery ground and long line in front of us; the inside of the cave is just as cold as outside, but at least we have out bedrolls and I have Haldir to snuggle up next to.

"Get some sleep," Thorin instructs. "We start at first light." Haldir helps me to sit against one of the walls while he gets our bedrolls ready, then helps me over to them. It's been close to a year since I last used my ability and I'm out of shape, the dizziness and migraine

a testament to that, so I make no fuss as I curl up into a ball on my side and Haldir curls up behind me, pulling a thick blanket over both of us with one of his arms under my head.

"Love you, Hal."

"I Love you, my jewel," he whispers into my hair. I lay there for a little while, on the brink of sleep, and just listen as everyone settles down for the night; slowly the panting breaths smooth out and snoring takes the place of whispering. Deciding it was safe enough, I allow my eyes to close and twine my fingers with my husband's.

And then the shit hits the fan.

End
file.